one or more stationary side walls,

an unsheathed optical fiber portion extending through each of said openings and having an outer cylindrical side surface,

means for pressing said side surface into engagement with said one or more side walls,

wherein said means comprises at least one movable arm defined by and attached to said front mask, and

[each said arm having a length substantially longer than the diameter of said fiber and a distal end that contacts said fiber for pressing said fiber against said one or more side walls.]

each said arm having a contact portion that contacts said fiber for pressing said fiber against said one or more side walls, and the distance from said contact portion to the arm portion attached to a front mask portion being greater than the diameter of said fiber.

Claim 7 (amended). The apparatus of Claim 6 wherein said means comprises at least two of said movable arms defined by said front mask.

Claim 8 cancelled.

Claim 9 (currently amended). The apparatus of Claim 6 wherein said contact portion being near the distal end is located in an initial position relative to said one or more side walls and is

moved away from said one or more side walls by said fiber when said fiber is inserted through said opening.

Claim 10 cancelled.

Claim 11 (currently amended). The apparatus of Claim 6 wherein said at least one side wall comprises at least two side walls, and

wherein said at least two side walls intersect each other and said fiber outer surface contacts each of said side walls and said means, and

said means comprises at least two of said movable arms, the [distal end] <u>contact portion</u> of each arm for pressing the fiber toward opposite ones of said two side walls.

Claim 12 cancelled.

Claim 13 (amended). An optical fiber array apparatus comprising

a housing,

a front mask coupled to said housing and having a matrix of fiber seating openings therethrough, each said opening having one or more stationary side walls,

an unsheathed optical fiber portion extending through each of said openings and having an outer cylindrical side surface,

means for pressing said side surface into engagement with said one or more side walls,

wherein said front mask is primarily made of a first material,

said means includes an element made of a second ~~flexible~~ material forming a flexible side wall of each front mask opening,

said second material being more flexible than said first material.

Claim 14 (original). The apparatus of Claim 13 wherein said fiber engages and flexes said element when said fiber is inserted into its respective opening.

Claim 15 (amended). The apparatus of Claim 14 wherein each of said elements are part of one of a plurality of elongated members.

Claim 16 (original). The apparatus of Claim 15 wherein

said front mask comprises a plurality of elongated transverse slots and each of said openings opens into one of said slots, and each of said elongated members extends along one of said transverse slots.

Claim 17 (amended). An optical fiber array apparatus comprising

a housing,

a front mask coupled to said housing and having a matrix of fiber seating openings therethrough, each said opening having one or more side walls,

an unsheathed optical fiber portion extending through each of said openings and having an outer cylindrical side surface,

means for pressing said side surface into engagement with said one or more side walls,

said means includes an element of flexible material forming one side wall of each front mask opening,

wherein said fiber engages and flexes said element when said fiber is inserted into its respective opening,

wherein each of said elements are part of elongated members,

wherein said front mask comprises a plurality of elongated transverse slots and each of said openings opens into one of said slots, and

wherein each of said members is secured in one of said slots.

Claim 18 (amended). The apparatus of Claim 17 wherein

said front mask includes projections projecting partially into each of said slot and each projection being located between two of said openings for restricting the movement of respective members portions when a fiber is inserted through the respective opening therebetween.

Claim 19 (currently amended). The apparatus of Claim 6 wherein

said front mask has a region about each said opening with [an axial]a first thickness in a direction parallel to the opening axis, and each said arm has at least a mid-section [axial] second thickness in a direction parallel to the opening

axis which is less than said [region with axial] first thickness.

Claim 20 (original). The apparatus of Claim 6 wherein each said front mask opening is larger in cross section than the cross section of said fiber portion and bonding material substantially fills a void between the fiber portion and opening side wall.

Claim 21 (original). The apparatus of Claim 13 wherein each said front mask opening is larger in cross section than the cross section of said fiber portion and bonding material substantially fills a void between the fiber portion and opening side wall.

REMARKS

This is an amendment after final rejection expressed in the Office Action dated January 14, 2004.

The courtesy extended by the Examiner to the undersigned attorney during the telephone conference conducted on March 5, 2004 is appreciated.

Filed herewith, without prejudice, is a Continued Examination Transmittal form which authorizes the related fees to be charged to the attorney's deposit account.

Also filed herewith are 11 sheets of formal drawings based

on the informal and corrected informal drawings previously filed. Approval and entrance of these formal drawings are requested. See Office Action Paragraph No. 5.

Claims 6, 7, 9, and 13 - 21 are advanced herein. Claims 1-5, 8, 10, and 12 have been cancelled without prejudice. Claims 6 and 19 are amended herein to more particularly point out and distinctly claim applicants' invention.

Claims 13 - 18 and 21 stand allowed in the outstanding Office Action.

Claim 19 stands rejected under 35 USC Sec. 112, second, as being unclear with respect to the meaning of "axial". Claim 19 is amended to avoid this ejection and clearly defines the axial direction to be parallel to the axis of the fiber openings. This is supported by the disclosure as filed, for example, in Figures 10 - 14 and related text. Accordingly, applicants request withdrawal of the 35 USC 112, second rejection.

Claims 6 is the only independent claim that stands rejected and all rejected claims ultimately depend from Claim 6. Claim 6 stands rejected under 35 USC 103 (a)as unpatentable over Basavanhally et al in view of Bonja. Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection for the following reasons. The technical problems to be solved in this art include trying to make the areas of these small crystalline material plates more flexible so that they can act as spring arms without cracking or breaking

during or after fiber insertion. Bonja fails to teach or disclose a spring arm that has an operational length between the fiber contact point and the plate attachment point greater than the diameter of the fiber being secured. The portion of Bonja's arm extending from the fiber contact point to the free end does not add to flexibility of the arm itself.

Thus, the Bonja spring arm would be much more likely to be less flexible and prone to cracking compared to the Claim 6 combination. More specifically, Bonja and Basavanhally, alone or in combination, fail(s) to teach or disclose any spring arm with a length between the fiber contact point and the arm attachment to the plate point that is greater than the diameter of the fiber. Compare any of the Bonja embodiments and specification to, for example, the exemplary embodiment of figures 10 - 14 hereof. Clearly, the Claim 6 combination provides a greater flexibility to the spring arm which are less likely to crack or break off.

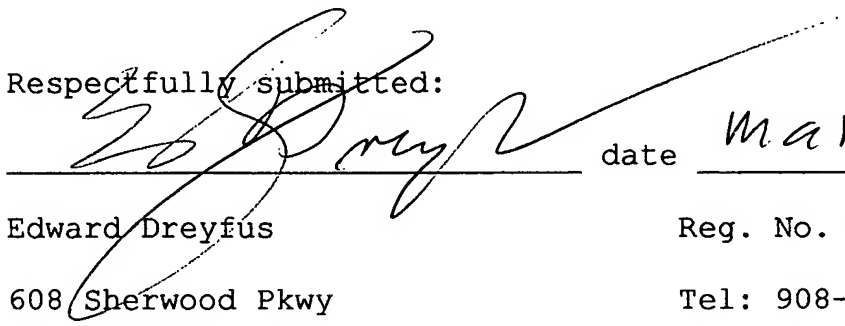
Applicants therefore request withdrawal of the subject rejection of claim 6 and the dependent claims therefrom.

Claim 9 is further allowable since none of the cited references even suggest making the mid-section of the arms thinner than the arm portion attached to the plate. This feature also contributes to the flexibility of the claimed arms.

Entrance of the above amendments and reconsideration in

view of the above remarks is requested. In the event the prosecution of this application can be advanced with a phone conference, it is requested applicants' attorney be called at 908-233-4666.

Respectfully submitted:



date Mar 6, 2004

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